

[Botsford]

W15003

1 Conn. 1938-9 Botsford

"So you been to see Billy Dunbar, hey?" says Mr. Botsford. "Fine feller, Billy is. I bet he told you somethin' about knifemakin'. He's a knifemaker from the time he was a kid, him and his brother Elmer and his old man. Billy and Elmer was old bachelors, and Billy never got married until real late in life, after Elmer and the old man were dead. Then he went down to Floridy one winter, Billy did, and married a woman and brought her back here to live. But she took sick and had to be taken to the hospital and she died there. So Billy's all alone again.

"He's a good housekeeper, Billy is. Cook and sew and clean, good's any woman. Finest meal I ever had—er one of 'em anyways—was up to Billy's cottage at Bantam lake. Cold winter day, him and Billy Morehouse was up there, and I took a notion to drive up and see 'em. Thought I'd do some fishin' through the ice. So I wrapped up good and hitched up the horse and went. Stopped up in Morris and it was eighteen below zero. Got up to Billy's place and him and Morehouse were settin' around the stove. My hands and feet and nose was about froze.

"Well, I got warmed up some, and Billy says, 'You're just in time for dinner.' I set down with 'em to a broiled steak, and say it was just about the finest steak I ever put a tooth into. Or maybe it was because I was cold and hungry. I says to Billy, 'You're quite a cook.' Billy says, 'A good knifemaker can do most anything. Cookin' ain't nothin'.'

2

"You know the knifemakers—the old Englishmen anyways—thought they was quite superior to the clockmakers. They said a good knife couldn't be made like a clock—different pieces by different men and then put together—they said a knife that was any

Library of Congress

good had to be made all the way by the same man. That give 'em the idea they was better workman than clockmakers.

“After dinner Billy went out, and pretty soon he come back in and his coat was wide open and he had his mittens off. ‘say,’ he says, ‘it's turned warm as anything. Let's go out and get some fish.’ So we went out and sure enough it was as warm and nice—

We went out on the ice and started to fish, and say, the perch was bitin' like I never see 'em bite before or since. The three of us—without any exaggeration—we caught a bushel basket of 'em.

“We went back to the cottage and got ready to go home. They said they was goin' to walk, and I said by God they was goin' to ride. I said if they didn't ride back with me I wouldn't carry their fish back for 'em. So finally they rode.

“Yes, Billy is a fine feller. I didn't know he was home from Floridy. I'll have to take a run down to see him. He must be about the only one of the old timers left down to the Bridge. Right next to him was the Tom Buxton place—they're gone. And next to them was the Bensons, they're gone. And old Augustus Morse used to live us in that house on the Watertown road where Tibbals lives—the Morse family is gone.

3

“It used to be quite a settlement one time. More prosperous than up here in Thomaston, that's a fact, but it's gone to seed these days. Why, I can remember when Burr Stoughton used to run his team twice a day down there, loaded high with grub for them people in the village. There was a woolen mill there right across the river from the main road—that's the one that Eli Terry started—burnt from when I was about fourteen year old—the there was the knife shop—and that granite quarry—you know a lot of granite from that quarry went into them old brownstone fronts in New York, did you ever know that? Plymouth granite. They had to stop workin' there because there was too much topsoil—couldn't get at it very good. But there's tons and tons of it left—that whole ledge runs back God knows how far.

Library of Congress

They used to cut out big paving blocks for New York city, too, before the days when they began usin' cement. Lot of fellers worked there. Stone cutters. Nels Bennett used to be boss of that quarry. They made trap rock for a while too but they lose out because they didn't have the right contacts over to Hartford. Couple of other companies had the inside track with the state.

"Used to have dances in the top floor of the knife shop building, the knifemakers did. The oldest spring in these parts is down in the village. Right across from Swalwell's house. First spring in the parish of Northbury, so it must be the village was settled before Thomaston was. They found Indian relics near the spring. That's where you'll find 'em 4 every time, near a spring. I've seen arrow heads dug up in this lot across the road when they were plowin' it up in the springtime. Because there's a spring just across the lot on Marine street.

"Indians'd camp near the springs, naturally, and they'd lose some of their belongin's or leave 'em behind, same's white people do. The ground must be full of 'em around here, if you only knew just where to look. Other things, too.

"I was over to a cousin of mine in New Milford one time and he took me out huntin'. We went up in the woods and separated, he went one way and me another. I come to a place where there was a lot of big old oaks growin', and I stood there for a while, thought I might see a partridge or somethin', and I noticed a kind of little ridge, all dirt and leaves. I I went over to it and started kicking around it with my foot, and you know what I uncovered? An old stone wall. I looked around little more, and by God I found the foundations of a house, and then of a barn, all grown over with underbrush, and in the foundations of the house was growing a great big oak, this big around. Now how the hell old do you s'pose that house was? Two-three hundred years, maybe. My cousin told me afterwards he cut down an oak right near that spot with 350 rings inside of it. He used it to make stone drag, and it was so damn big through that tree was, he didn't need to take another. 'twas wide enough iself. So that goes to show them trees in that place were old.

Library of Congress

“If you only knew where to look, boy, the things you 5 might find. Some time you ain't got nothin' better to do you take a walk up in the Gaskins and see if you can find the ruins of old man Gaskin's house. The story went around when I was a kid that he had money buried up there somewheres. And it's finders keepers. If you find anything, just remember who gave you the tip. Remember your friend Art Botsford.”